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ABSTRACT

A major concern in the field of special education is the effective delivery of services and their administrative organization. A conceptual definition for "organization" as it applies to special education is developed. Specific areas in special education organization that warrant research are identified and described. Examples include: (1) the need to determine the extent to which organization facilitates or hampers the achievement of stated objectives; (2) the need to determine the impact of coordination of research, teaching, and service delivery upon the effectiveness of special education programs; (3) the impact of the functions of recruiting, employing, training, and evaluating special education personnel on the effectiveness of service delivery; (4) factors in group relationships that influence interpretation and implementation of formal administrative policy in special education; (5) methods for best utilizing and developing the informal relationships of the school. Finally, methods that can be utilized in planning and conducting such research are examined. Some of the difficulties encountered in designing and conducting research on problems in administrative organization are outlined. (JDD)

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Needed Research in the Organization and Delivery of Special Education Services

The continued effectiveness of any organization, including public schools depends: (1) upon its being examined periodically in an objective and scientific manner, and (2) upon the willingness of the school's administrators to effect changes in the light of the findings of such examinations. This dual process, if effectively carried out, must involve a fair representation of the school's faculty and staff in the planning of the intended changes. Proposed changes in school service delivery is strongly supported by the research literature, however, it is often extremely difficult to implement desired changes, due to established relationships (personal and professional), as well as, the duties and responsibilities being altered or disrupted.

Since change is inevitable, the continued effectiveness of the school will depend upon its ability to relate meaningfully its scarce resources to the changing, complex needs and interests of the school's constituents, namely the students, parents, and broader community. It is suggested that a major concern today is the effective delivery of special education services, and its attending role in the broader school curriculum, and consequently, upon its administrative organization.

In order to develop the topic "Needed Reserch in the Organization and Delivery of Special Education Services," three important areas must be examined. First, a conceptual definition for organization as it applies to Special Education needs to be developed. Second, as the major point of emphasis specific areas in special education organization that warrant research need to be identified and described. Third, the methods that can be

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utilized in planning and conducting such research need to be examined.

The term "organization" is given several meanings by scores of writers in the field of educational administration. Recognition is generally given to both the formal and informal organization. Interestingly, two meanings are frequently used to describe the formal organization: the noun meaning and the verb meaning. However, for the purposes of our discussion, organization is the medium through which individuals and groups collectively seek to attain stated objectives.

The verb phrase of the definition is often indicated by stating that an organization as previously defined is developed as a result of engaging in "organizing resources" which is accomplished by: (a) assembling and arranging the various resources available to the school in whatever pattern or combination appears most likely to result in the attainment of the stated objectives, and (b) clearly specifying the duties and responsibilities of faculty and staff, establishing the working relationships, and developing policies to guide the use of such resources.

An informal organization is present in every school and is the system of interpersonal relations which forms to affect or influence decisions made in the formal setting. This informal system is often overlooked and omitted from the formal scheme. However, it should be kept in mind that the informal organization is a very dynamic structure of special interest groups.

In assessing the research needs for the Organization and Delivery of Special Education Services, there must be a positive attempt to: (a) identify some of the major research areas in organizational theory, and the applicability to special education, (b) describe some of the research that has been conducted in each selected area, and (c) point up specific needs in the special education areas that warrant additional research.

Almost every definition of organization states that the purposes of administration are to carry out the objectives for which the organization exists. Granted that the broad purposes of Special Education is stated in PL 94-142, and is spelled out in detail in state education laws and court decisions, there seemingly is still a need for defining its objectives and exploring the many ways in which service delivery can be improved, organized, restructed, and delivered.

Very often school administrators and special eduction personnel do not realize the importance of spending the time necessary to determine objectives. Because of this, those administrators and teachers are so concerned with their on-going activities that they lose sight of what they are trying to accomplish. They fail to realize that objectives should be the criteria by which (a) organization and procedures are determined, (b) educational content is outlined, (c) materials are selected, (d) teaching procedures and learning experiences are developed, and (e) accomplishments are evaluated.

The real concern is seemingly over the emphasis given to reorganization or changes in organization without due regard to the ends that special education programs are seeking to achieve. Changes are generally oriented toward management, on-going

procedures, and activities rather than on the objectives of the special education program. While some attempt has been made to define the objectives of Special Education in several studies, none has attempted to analyze Special Education's organization in relation to the purposes for which PL 94-142 was established.

Once again, organizations may be viewed as the medium through which individuals and groups collectively pool their efforts to attain stated objectives. The successful attainment of these objectives depends largely upon the way resources are assembled and arranged, responsibilities are specified, working relationships are established, and policies are developed to guide the use of such resources.

A real need in research is to determine how much organization facilitates or hampers the achievement of stated objectives. Few studies have attempted to appraise special education organization in relations to its objectives. One of the difficulties of evaluating educational organizations is the lack of clearly defined criteria for determining the quality of behavioral changes effected in people.

The effectiveness and efficiency of the "for profit" organization can be more readily determined since its objective is generally a tangible product built to specifications. This, of course, is not to imply that the effectiveness and efficiency of educational organizations in achieving objectiveness cannot be determined. More importantly, it is to emphasize the need for careful planning and studying of the purposes of the organization before any attempt is made to assess its effectiveness. Special education and "regular" education professionals can never expect to reach the degree of perfection that an industrial organization can achieve in turning out a finished product. However, through continuous study and planning, they can endeavor to approach a certain level of competency in effecting and measuring behavioral changes in people. Too, it should be recognized that organization is but one of several variables that will have to be considered in measuring behavioral changes.

A number of factors seem to be important to the overall development of effective special education programs. But close and effective coordination among research, teaching, and service delivery are important for best results.

Wide differences exist among special education program in the organization and administration of the research, teaching, and service delivery functins. Besides differences in organization and administration, there are considerable differences in the professional status of special education staff members as compared to "regualr" classroom personnel.

While these observations reflect the institutional values to be derived from closely coordinated Special Education programs, additional research is needed to identify bases that will facilitate coordination of the three functions. There is also need for studies to determine the impact of coordination of research, teaching, and service delivery upon the effectiveness of planning, developing, executing, and evaluating special education programs.

An effective and unified program of special education as used means that all work being done at the various levels of the

organization is directly related to the problems of children, and consequently, Special Education's objectives.

Certain assumptions are basic to this concept of an effective and unified program of special education. The first assumption is that the program is "student" centered. Such a program emphasizes as its starting point and basis, the problems of the people special education serves.

A second assumption is that the various componets of the special education are contributing to the broad basic purposes: each student, each objective, and each activity are in some measure contributing to the attainment of the ultimate objectives.

The third assumption is that cooperative faculty and staff planning and coordination of efforts are essential to implementing a unified special education service delivery program.

One of the many challenges confronting public schools today is to search for ways to respond to the changing, complex neds of students while at the same time to coordinate their increasingly complicated organizations so that the needs of children can be meaningfully related to the resources available. No organization (public or "for-profit") can long remain static.

Adjustments in the form of administrative organizational structure may be required. These may include changes in basic program objectives, in size of staff, in professional competency, in program emphasis, in the nature of organizational relationships within which the school must operate and changes in the need for long-range as well as short-range planning of programs, personnel, and finances.

Such questions as "what are the bases for determining whether changes are needed in organization?" "How can need adjustments be made in an organization?" and "How can the effectiveness of changes in organization be measured?" need to be answered if Special Education services are to remain sensitive to the nature and scope of the problems confronting school age children.

What are the bases for recruiting, employing, training, and evaluating special education personnel? These functions are directly related to the effectiveness of service delivery, and the manner in which they are performed is governed largely by the policies of school boards, and the procedures, and practices acted upon by school administrators.

Scientifically derived information is needed by special education administrative staff in making decisions about the general personnel program. Sound policies, procedures, and practices need to be developed that will facilitate the employment of persons who have the necessary qalifications to fill adequately the positions and who have the potential to assume additional responsibilities.

Another important need is the development and implementation of a training program designed to increase faculty and staff effectiveness, efficiency, motivation, and job satisfaction. The continued growth and development of staff members will depend to a large degree on the methods utilized in systematically evaluating the job performance of each faculty and staff member, and the uses made of the findings.

Changes in administrative organization which directly affect personnel functions, as well as changes in the problems confronting special education children, make it doubly important that scientific, factual information be obtained as a basis for strengthening the personnel and programmatic functions associated with the delivery of special education services.

It is generally agreed that in order for any service delivery program to approach maximum achievement, both the formal and informal organization must perceive the task of the school's program, in general, and the special education program, in particular, as being the same. If the informal organization is in congruence with the purposes and program of the formal, it can be a very important asset towards goal attainment. This is due in part to the role that informal organizations play in facilitating communication, providing for group cohesiveness, and fostering on the part of the school's faculty and staff a feeling of professional respect and integrity.

It is assumed that every administrtor draws on the informal and formal relationships within his or her school, to determine and implement effective school-wide policy. Such sources as informal counseling with faculty and staff members, a system of informal committees, and popular opinion of colleagues are all bases for administrative decision making. Several questions needing answers serve as areas of research in special education organization. One that occurs immediately is "What conditions are provided by the special education administrator to best utilize and develop the informal organization?" Lines of communication to all faculty and stafff members must be kept open and continuously cultivated. This too suggests one researchable question, "What are the lines of communication on which the administrator can depend for reliable decision making?" A system of faculty committees might be maintained with an atmosphere of free exchange of ideas existent.

When formal policy statements are issued by school administrators, they usually come after much effort by the administrative staff and other appropriate persons, and many hours of weighing the consequences and anticipating implementation of such policy. Upon receipt of such policies through formal channels, the faculty and staff of a school usually do not accept and follow these policies on blind faith, but much discussion, interpretation, and conjecturing of implications takes place.

At this point, one specific question can be posed that is worthy of research effort, "What are the factors in group relationships that influence interpretation and implementation of formal administrative polciy in special education?"

Progressive administrators in all types of school settings are ever alert to the changes in their programs and student conditions that might require major changes in organizational structure and function. As previously indicated, when major organizational changes are made it is an effort to more effectively focus resources on the major problems confronting the many children in need of special education services.

That a body of research knowledge is needed by any administrator before major organizational changes take place is represented by the following question: "What roles can be assumed by

faculty and staff members in influencing acceptance of major formal organizational changes?" A research minded administrator might raise the question,"What key faculty and staff leaders in the informal sturcture of the school can determine the success of implementation of major orgnizational changes?"

Due to the nature of the functioning of Special Education programs, with the flexibility and permissiveness necessary to operate effectively, it is assumed that informal interpersonal relationships play a rather significant role in the decision-making process within special education programs. It is quite apparent that knowledge of the make-up, functioning, and process of informal relationships is necessary if informal groupings are to be utilized in the organization and delivery of special education services.

Several research questions that might be addressed by school administrators are: (1) What identifiable informal groups exist within the formal structure of the school? (2) What social and personal characteristics differentiate these groupings of people? (3) What is the nature of their strengths and how do they influence decision making? (4) What changes take place in the structure of such groups?

Much evidence is available both on the nature and functioning of groups, as well as on the research methodology used in formal and informal group investigations. The fields of psychology and sociology have much to offer in this regard. The application of this body of knowledge to special education could be accomplished in the following ways: (1) Synthesize from existing literature that which is now known about the formal-informal group dynamic, (2) Make application of established principles, theory, and practices to the operation of special education programs, i.e., the delivery of special education services, (3) Plan and conduct research in Special Education using proven research techniques, e.g., quantitative, qualitative, ethnographic, case study, etc.

No discussion of research needs in organization would be complete without considering some of the difficulties that will be encountered in planning, designing, and conducting research on problems in administrative organization.

The study of organization and delivery of special education services is a relatively new field. There has been no large accumulation of factual material concerning it. Theoretical formulations must be based upon a considerable body of fact, therefore, it seems essential that some of the research in the organization and delivery of special education services will have to be of an exploratory nature. It is suggested that exploratory descriptive research precede experimental research. Some of the problems that the administrator-researcher will encounter lend themselves to exploratory descriptive research, while other problems may be approached through the testing of hypotheses and experimental research design.

Often, educators have a tendency to think that rigorous experimentation and quantitative measurement (since they have acquired high prestige in the physical sciences), are the only acceptable (legitimate) tools of social sciences. However, increasingly educators are utilizing other methods than rigorous

experimentation, for example, in areas such as human relations heavy reliance must be placed on observation and accurate description of behavioral events. One needs only to examine research findings in cultural anthropology to appreciate the contributions (values) that can be obtained through observation and description of behavioral situations.

It seems reasonable to conclude that research in the organization and delivery of special education services will also continue to be of an exploratory nature until a considerable body of research data has been accumulated. Even then it must be recognized that the act of conducting research on human subjects in itself alter human behavior, hence one can never go back and observe the organization as it existed prior to the study.